

WELFARE / Caritas network says safety net being pulled away

Poor people will not survive 'Victorian' welfare cuts

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THE SOCIAL action arm of the Church in England and Wales has painted a harrowing picture of the impact of benefit cuts in a damning report into what it called a return to "Victorian" poverty.

The report launched this week collated the experiences of three of the Catholic Social Action Network's (CSAN) member organisations – Nugent Care in Liverpool, Brushstrokes in Birmingham and Caritas Anchor House in London – over the five

years since welfare cuts were implemented.

It found that claimants and support staff had been pushed "to the edge of their capacity" by the speed and multiplicity of cuts, with clients "finding it increasingly difficult to survive".

At the report launch in London, CSAN members predicted that the situation would get worse following the Government's decision, announced in the Budget last week, to cut a further £12 billion from welfare payments.

Peter Boylan, of Liverpool-based charity Nugent Care, said it had been forced to move people who had their community care grants cut into flats furnished by items belonging to the recently deceased. He explained: "It sounds Victorian: there are coffins going out the home one end and we're at the other, waiting."

In response, the Department for Work and Pensions said that the examples were not a "representative sample."

Meanwhile the Labour MP Helen Goodman has accused Iain

Duncan Smith, the Work and Pensions Secretary and a Catholic, of targeting Catholics with his policies. She asked, "will he explain why cutting tax credits for large families is a fair thing to do when that will be concentrated on Roman Catholic families and Catholics from other minorities? Does he understand that every child matters?"

(See Joanna Moorhead, pages 6-7.)

